



Richard Helms: one big weakness

Nixon set to drop spy chief

By Stephen Aris
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AFTER MORE than six years as America's spymaster, Richard McGarrah Helms, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and doyen of the intelligence establishment, is on the way out—perhaps the most surprising victim of the Nixon reshuffle.

Neither the White House nor the CIA itself (which, improbably, employs a public relations officer) would confirm last week that Helms had been sacked. But knowledgeable insiders are convinced that his replacement, less than a year after he had been given the job of reorganising the sprawling intelligence services, is imminent.

His successor in the executive suite of "The Pickle Factory"—the nickname for the vast CIA complex just outside Washington—is almost certain to be James R. Schlesinger, Chairman of the US Atomic Energy Commission, who has written a massive, secret study of US intelligence commissioned by President Nixon and Henry Kissinger last year.

Unlike Helms, Schlesinger is no expert in the dirty business of undercover warfare. He is a businessman by training and outlook. If his appointment goes through he will be the first real "outsider" to head the CIA since the agency was formed by President Truman in 1947.

The reasons for Helms's downfall are by no means clear. But the fact that Nixon has apparently chosen a businessman to succeed him is significant.

IN MANY respects, Helms, a sophisticated, tennis-playing 59-year-old with a British second wife, has been one of the most accomplished directors the CIA has ever had. After a brief spell as a newspaperman (he got an exclusive interview with Hitler when only 23), he has been a Secret Service agent all his life. For 15 years he was chief of the CIA's "plans" department which controls all undercover activities. In contrast to the CIA's first director, Allen Dulles, he is not, by all accounts, an intransigent cold-war warrior and under his guidance the CIA has taken, surprising as it may seem, a consistently "dove-like" line on Vietnam since at least 1964.

But according to insiders, Helms for all his sophistication and political adroitness has one serious weakness: administration is not his strong point. "He is not very interested in it or very good at it," says one man who worked closely with Helms for many years. As a number of high-ranking government servants have discovered to their cost over the last fortnight, administrative slackness is something that Nixon cannot abide.

Like all other government departments, the intelligence services, which between them account for something like £2,400 million a year, have come under intense pressure from the White House to cut their budgets. The CIA itself, with a budget of £280 million, is not one of the big spenders. But since November 1971, Helms, as chairman of the Intelligence Resources Advisory Committee, has had the daunting task of controlling the entire intelligence budget, including that of the armed forces.

Apparently Helms has not been very successful in persuading the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who spend nearly seven times as much as the CIA on intelligence, to cut back.